

**DRAFT**

**Public Involvement in South Florida Ecosystem Restoration**

Restoring the Everglades is a national, state, tribal, and local priority. The South Florida ecosystem provides a rich natural heritage for all Americans and supports the economy and the high quality of life of Floridians and Native American Indians who live there. The American people have a strong interest in preserving this 18,000-square-mile region of subtropical uplands, wetlands, and coral reefs that extends from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes south of Orlando through Florida Bay and the reefs southwest of the Florida Keys.

This complex and challenging restoration is being implemented through a combination of federal, state, local and tribal initiatives. To facilitate the coordination of these initiatives, Congress established the intergovernmental South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force in 1996. A Florida-based Working Group and Science Coordination Group assist the Task Force in fulfilling its responsibilities. These federal, state, local, and tribal representatives work cooperatively and communicate with everyone in this unprecedented conservation endeavor.

Public involvement is an essential element of the restoration effort. The Task Force and the member agencies and entities represented on the Task Force perform complimentary but different roles with the public. The Task Force role is to include the public in its coordination of the strategic or system-wide aspects of restoration while the agencies roles are to implement the public communication and outreach responsibilities of their specific programs and projects.

The Task Force has a number of initiatives to communicate and include the public in its system-wide coordination efforts. The Task Force has implemented procedures to facilitate public participation in all of the meetings held by the Task Force and its subordinate groups. The Task Force website ([www.sfrestore.org](http://www.sfrestore.org)) increasingly serves as one of the primary tools to help disseminate this information. Advance notice of meetings, presentations for upcoming and past meetings, records of meeting proceedings, membership listings, and coordination documents can all be found on the Task Force website.

Every two years the Task Force prepares with public input several coordination documents. An updated strategy outlines how the restoration effort will occur, identifies the resources needed, establishes responsibility for accomplishing actions, and links strategic goals to outcome-oriented goals. Along with the strategy the Task Force prepares a Biennial Report to provide an update on the activities of the Task Force and its members and to document the progress that has been made. Additionally the Task Force prepares a plan for coordinating the system-wide science aspects of restoration. The Task Force and Working Group meetings also provide an opportunity for the public to participate in consultation on key aspects of the implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

The Task Force and the Museum of Science and Discovery in Fort Lauderdale formed a public/private partnership in 1999 to work together on creative outreach strategies. The programs from this partnership have educated nearly 800,000 people about Everglades restoration over the past 2 years alone.

Many of the members of the Task Force and Working Group have public involvement and outreach efforts associated with the implementation of their restoration plans and programs. A summary of these efforts are listed below:

<b>Counties</b>
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**Broward County**

***Water Matters***

This is a public information program that increases water conservation awareness. Theme is water for people, animal, and plants.

<b>Joint State/Federal CERP</b>
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**NOAA/Florida Sea Grant**

***The Florida Bay SFRESTORE Education Project***

This program provides a communication link between South Florida citizens and the research community working toward marine ecosystem management and works to empower citizens to make science based decisions on issues that affect these ecosystems. It also provides outreach education that addresses local and regional water quality issues and concerns and provides information on both upland and coastal communities about local marine water quality, living marine resources, protected species, and other issues that impact the South Florida Coastal Ecosystem including Florida Bay and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary that will stimulate changes in behavior to support effective restoration management efforts. (Don't know if this is still in place.)

**Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**

***Coral Reef Classroom***

This program teaches basic coral reef biology and concepts of habitat interdependence by engaging students in activities such as water quality sapling, data collection, and evaluation.

**SFWMD/USACE**

***CERP Environmental and Economic Equity Program Management Plan***

Promotes economic equity throughout the life of the CERP project through utilization of socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses and individuals in the performance of prime contract and subcontract awards.

The equity aspects of this program address small business contracting. The goal of increasing diversity is woven into the fabric of an improved procurement process, becoming an integral and integrated component of the overall process. In addition, increased business outreach efforts and technical assistance are planned to help small businesses improve. To ensure these business concerns are technically capable to perform the anticipated contracts, efforts will be made to ensure workforce development through universities, community colleges, and skill training programs.

## Distribution Working Group Meeting August 30, 2005

This will help to ensure that the residents of the communities have the necessary skills for employment.

### ***Outreach Program Management Plan (Approved 2001)***

There are 6 task groups that have a goal of increasing public awareness and involvement in the restoration of the everglades watershed. 1. Public information 2. Public stakeholder and agency involvement 3. Outreach to minority communities 4. Outreach to socially and economically disadvantaged communities. 5. Internal management and communications 6. Evaluation and Assessment of Outreach Activities.

Some of the specific actions that are carried out in this plan that is implemented by both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the SFWMD include:

- General and targeted audience publications and electronic communications,
- Middle and high school education,
- CERP information center traveling Kiosks
- a CERP DVD, distributed in partnership with the Florida Aquarium, Museum of Discovery & Science and Everglades National Park (ENP)
- Minority radio and business forums on radio and community meetings
- Speaker's Bureau presentations to community groups
- Coordinated Public Input and Stakeholder meetings for each Project Implementation Report (PIR)

### ***NEPA***

All CERP projects go through a public information process to meet the requirements of this environmental protection act.

### ***Community Dialogues***

Pilot program to reach into communities through small, informal meetings with a cross-section of leaders in local communities. It is hoped this will provided a basis for an ongoing two way dialogue and that those attending will act as conduits into their communities, particularly minority and economically disadvantaged communities.

### ***Community Outreach in Action***

A CERP publication began in summer 2002 that specifically targets African-American populations. Distributed as inserts in African-American newspapers and available at government centers and other public locations in African American cities. There is a similar Spanish publication distributed through Nuevo Herald.

<b>State of Florida</b>
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### **Department of Environmental Protection**

#### ***Everglades Radio Network Station***

The ERN broadcast was launched on Feb. 23, 2004 and provides 18,000 vehicles per day traveling along the "Alligator Alley" portion of I-75 with "magazine style" radio segments about the Everglades ecosystem and its restoration. The ERN provides a component of a broader comprehensive environmental education program for Florida residents and visitors.

## Distribution Working Group Meeting August 30, 2005

Program topics include Everglades animals, such as Florida panthers, alligators and various birds, as well as interesting plants—both natives and unwanted exotics that are invading the ecosystem. Personality profiles include photographer Clyde Butcher and author Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who coined the famous phrase “River of Grass” to describe the Everglades landscape. A historical segment describes President Harry Truman’s dedication of Everglades National Park in 1947. Nature sounds, music and lively interviews round out the broadcast.

### **South Florida Water Management District**

In addition to implementation of the joint outreach plan with the USACE, the SFWMD conducts additional outreach activities including:

- Work with various public, private, and non-profit entities to develop, enhance and display Everglades Information—including Museums, Parks and Nature Centers, Rest Stops, Environmental Academies & Magnet schools, radio and television clips, workforce development/job training programs
- Website maintained for public access
- One-on-one meetings
- Coordinated public input through the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) (stakeholder advisory body to the SFWMD Governing Board, and adopted as an advisory body to the Task Force).

### **Federal Agencies**

#### **US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE)**

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#### ***General Minority/Community Affairs***

Beyond CERP, the USACE as a federal agency adheres to the Small Business Act Public Law 85-536. This law requires the government to aid, counsel, assist, and protect, insofar as is possible, the interests of small business concerns in order to preserve free competitive enterprise, to ensure that a fair portion of the total purchases and contracts or subcontracts for property and services for the government be placed with small business enterprises, and to maintain and strengthen the overall economy of the nation.

Each year USACE is assigned target goals for its small business program. There are no separate target goals for CERP. The USACE Small Business Office provides outreach to businesses, training, one-on-one counseling and marketing opportunities.

### **Everglades National Park**

#### ***Clemson University South Florida Population Study***

Clemson University conducted a preference study in South Florida for ENP. The final report is not available as of July 2005.

#### ***Panel exhibit for Restoration***

This exhibit is in the park and educates visitors on restoration.

#### ***Miami Community Partners***

This is an ongoing program that works to increase community awareness and participation in the South Florida national parks and preserves among underrepresented and culturally diverse segments of the population, particularly in regards to park accessibility, use, programs, and protection.

#### ***Daily Park Activities***

Each tour provided to visitors has restoration information included.

### **Big Cypress National Preserve**

Though Big Cypress may not conduct specific programs related to restoration, it is always a topic that is weaved into their programs. The Preserve provides a variety of programs which include swamp walks, bike hikes, canoe trips, car caravans and trail hikes. We also conduct an education program to 6th grade students in Collier County and have an extensive outreach/special program calendar. They don't do too many non-personal type of interpretive products, but we do produce the "National Parks of South Florida: Park Stories" document, which always deals with some elements of restoration.

The preserve's annual visitation is typically between 300,000 - 500,000, and visitation to interpretive programs and facilities (including VC) is typically around 100,000 - 150,000 annually.

### **National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**

All formal Outreach programs are administered from the agencies headquarters or from the Regional Management office in St. Petersburg, Florida. They are directed to individuals impacted by fishing, marine mammals, and endangered and protected species regulations. NOAA fisheries research staff in Miami conducts informal outreach on an individual and ad hoc basis. Information on South Florida is included when appropriate. Minority communities in Miami-Dade County are included in these informal outreach activities.

#### ***NOAA 8-Contracts***

These are managed through the administrative contract office in Kansas City, MO and are determined by that office for all of the southeastern and central United States.

#### ***NOAA Fisheries Research***

This is a grant program for south Florida used each year for grants to predominately minority institutions of higher learning.